Free menstrual products are overdue

Tampons and pads have recently been installed into every girls bathrooms for open use

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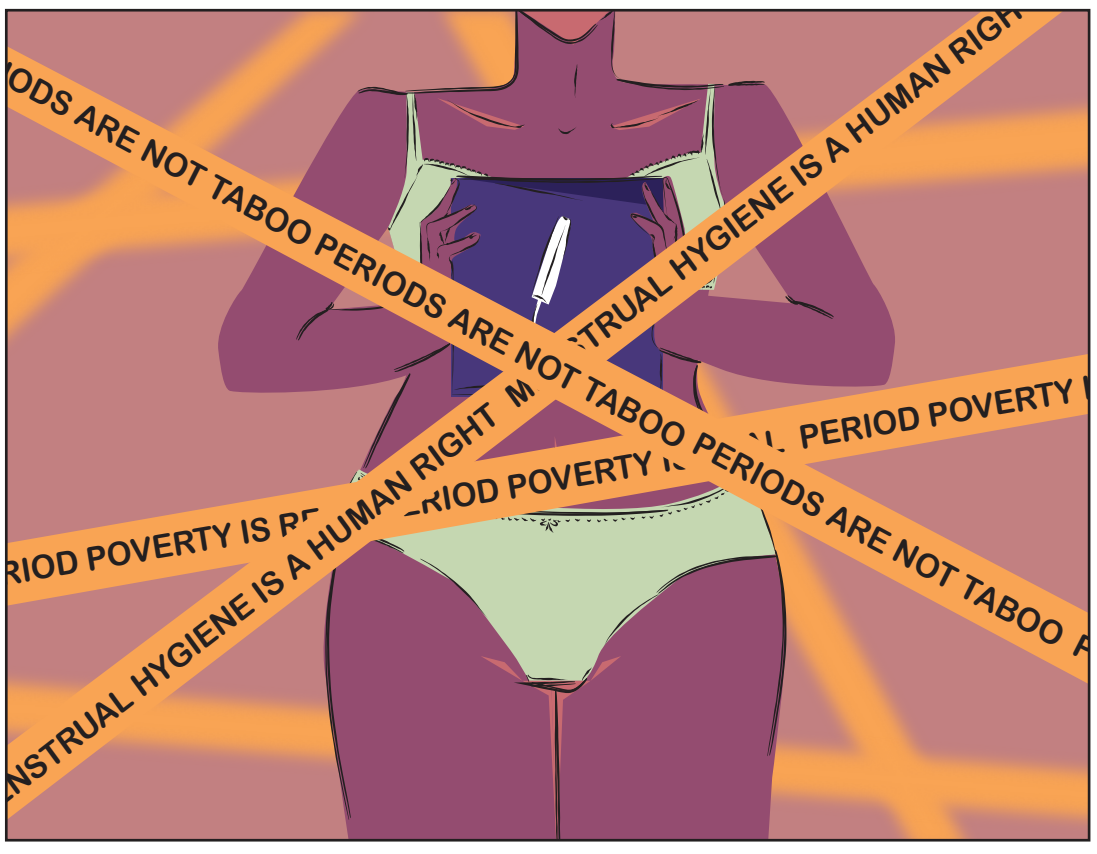
In 2017 a law was passed in California requiring public schools in low income areas to provide free tampons, pads, and other period products in bathrooms. Recently, the California legislation has expanded that previous law to say that all public school bathrooms must stock free menstrual products starting next school year. This year, Bowie is following that model and putting free menstrual products in our restrooms as well.

In my opinion, having free menstrual products in our restrooms is a positive and long overdue decision. In most cases, the people making laws about menstrual products are men that either don't understand women's experiences, or are too embarrassed to talk about them. This has caused the majority of women's rights to go unnoticed and not talked about.

Throughout history women have been shamed for their periods and it has negatively affected the way we interact with the normal bodily functions. For instance, a 2019 Kentucky bill was proposed that would make menstural products non-taxable. It didn't even make it out of committee. Shying away from this subject is one of the reasons that so many people don't have access to the sanitary products they need.

A lot of female students also have to leave school due to not being prepared to manage a bleed through. A CNN survey from this year showed that one fourth of women in the U.S. alone have missed a day of school due to their period. Most commonly this absence is due to not being prepared or not having access to the necessary period products.

Another study from the Global Citizen in 2018 showed that approximately 131 million girls around the world are out of school at some point each year due to not having access to sanitary menstrual products. This means that not having access to these essential commodities directly affects women's education with the lack of school recognition and support.



ART BY Isabella del Nido

Additionally, I think it is a good thing free menstrual products have been made available in our bathrooms. Period products can be expensive and not everyone can afford them. Only 10 states in the US have no taxes on menstrual products and 30 states have luxury taxes on them. Luxury taxes can be as high as 20% like in Mississippi, Alabama, and even Texas.

Other necessities like groceries, water, and prescription drugs are exempt from taxes in the state of Texas, so why shouldn't menstrual products be as well? For so many women living in Texas these products are a necessity.

According to a CNN article in 2021, women in America spend approximately $20 million dollars every year purely on the taxes that come with menstrual products. Having these free menstrual products in our restrooms may take off some financial pressure for some students and families.

Keep in mind that half the Bowie population is female, that means around 1500 women and girls on campus need access to menstrual products. Periods may be considered a taboo subject for some people but we need to recognize just how many people this affects and benefits.

But why are periods considered such a taboo subject? Well, in my opinion, the answer to that is simple: Misogyny. It's no great secret that throughout history power has been passed on from man to man. Men have always been the ones in positions of power to make meaningful decisions, including decisions about women's bodies.

In fact, a study conducted by the New York Post in 2018 found that 42% of women have been shamed for their periods before. If we work to break down these biases and talk about these subjects then it will help normalize discussions about bodily functions.

Because of the expenses put on menstrual products some people may argue that it will cost the school district or state too much money. Others might not want their tax dollars to go to paying for someone else's pads and tampons. At the end of the day you're still going to have to pay taxes and schools are going to do with their funding as they please. Bowie is doing a lot this year to try and make school a more comfortable and accepting place. How can trying to make students more comfortable at school be a bad thing?

We as people have a tendency to live in our own little bubbles but the prospect of simply not having the funds to get menstrual products is a very real reality for not only people around the world, but in Texas and at Bowie. Everyone deserves the right to be comfortable in their own skin and not stress about whether or not their period will affect their education. Having free menstrual products in our bathrooms is something that will affect a large group of people and is an overall positive and necessary societal implementation.

Facebook employee exposes the company's intentions

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In late September, 1,000's of internal Facebook files were leaked revealing Facebook's own executives and researchers are well aware of the harm their platforms cause.

Knowing this, they have chosen to ignore the damages in order to profit. The documents were given to the Securities and Exchange Commission, Congress and the Wall Street Journal.

About a week after they were leaked, the whistle-blower came forward. Her name is Frances Haugen, a former data scientist for Facebook.

Haugen worked for Pinterest and Google before joining Facebook in 2019. When she started, she showed interest in working with the company to stop the spread of, and protect the public from misinformation after losing a close friend to online conspiracy theories.

She revealed herself on a "60 Minutes" interview where she thoroughly explained the extent to how Facebook manages and magnifies the hate and misinformation spread on it's platform.

The company denies this saying that it has maintained necessary safeguards, though it is quite obvious that safety has been removed to some degree.

This is prevalent in the spreading of right-wing conspiratorial content that populated people's phones leading up to the January 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol Building, according to Haugen.

From physical violence, to the mental side of things, Haugen shared that Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, has been proven by their own internal research to have negative mental effects on teenage girls.

Since 2018, Facebook has prioritized MSI (meaningful social interactions), an algorithm that shows predicted content based on content an individual has shown to interact with the most, such as comments, likes and reshares.

Facebook promotes MSI, saying it is beneficial for relationships and well-being, although its proven to increase divisive, abhorrent content.

False information is easily spread to the feeds of these girls' Instagram's that push self-image ideals and eating disorders.

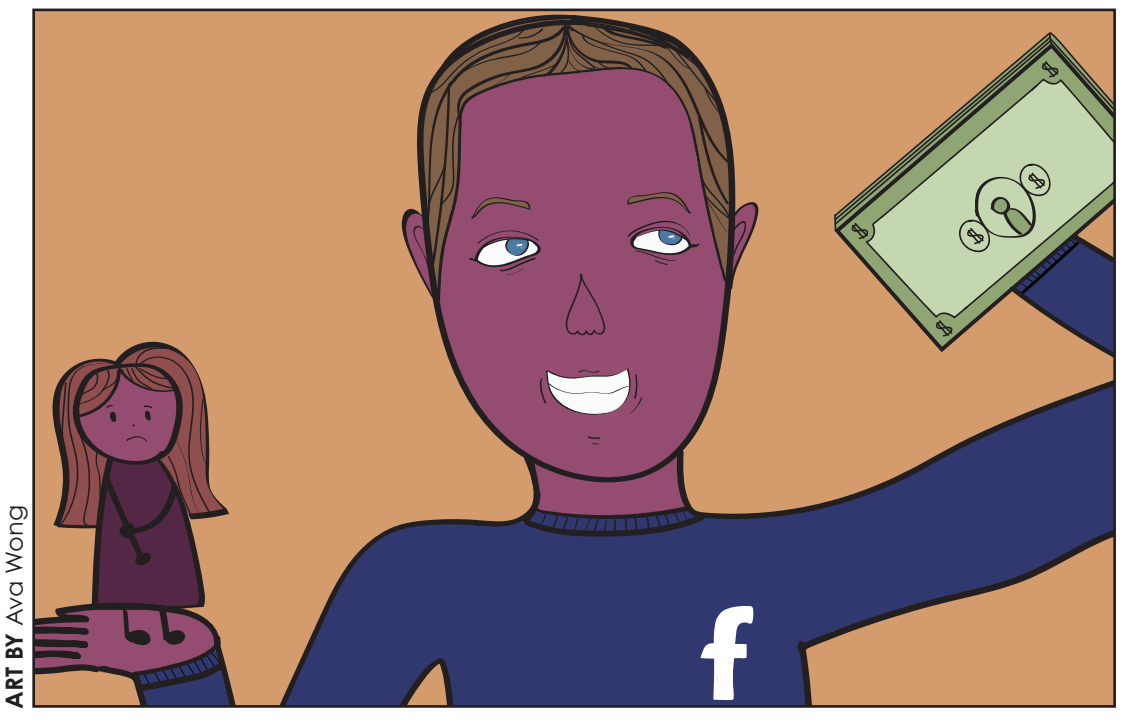
The more teenagers believe these ideas, the more they interact with the posts, which the algorithm picks up and continues to display this content, continuing the horrible process.

Teenagers are trapped in an endless cycle of mental health and body issues because it profits Instagram.

As a teenage girl, I've seen first hand the negative effects Instagram has had on myself and people around me. To know there is truthful research to this, and the company ignored it to keep us on the app, feels like a stab in the back. Violence is all around social media, it has to stop.

Facebook global head of safety Antigone Davis was questioned about Facebook's negative and harmful effects on teenagers and children during a hearing late September after the documents were leaked.

Shortly after, Haugen testified before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation on Capitol Hill. Here, Haugen explained the extent of harm forms of social media causes young people.



ART BY Ava Wong

Several senators discussed proposed bills that would add safety provisions for young users. Haugen even suggested increasing the minimum age for any person using social media to 17 years instead of 13 years, which is a little extreme.

We should first and foremost strengthen security because it is not just teenagers affected by the harm.

Adults are constantly being fed misinformation and it can be just as harmful and lead to events such as the January 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol Building.

Haugen also pointed out that these few documents were just the tip of the iceberg. She encouraged lawmakers to demand more documents and internal research from Facebook, stating that it was the only way for Congress to have complete transparency and understanding when it comes to regulating social media.

Facebook disagreed with her testimony but admitted new regulations for the internet were long overdue.

Times are constantly changing and social media is constantly changing. With this change we also need order and law to keep everyone safe and open to truthful information. It's time for Congress to act.

BULLDAWGS SPEAK OUT

What measures do you think should be taken to address the homeless situation in Austin?

INTERVIEWS BY *Mazzy Warren* ***PHOTOS COURTESY OF*** *Nick Wood*

Mitchell Navarrete
Freshman

"We want the government to help the homeless. I think they should fund homeless shelters by increasing taxes for funding."

Lydia Mikkelsen
Sophomore

"I think that it should be talked about more in Austin, we have a pretty bad homeless issue. So I feel the government, needs to start taking care of them, by building tiny houses like California did."

Ren Alma
Junior

"I think we need to supply more stuff to homeless people, like food and other things that they can use, [and] we could use taxes or fundraising to pay for it."

Mackenzie Kirk
Senior

"I personally think we need to actually do something about it. There's been a lot of bills, which I think is a good thing that they're getting off the streets, but it's just a problem of where they're going."

Rose Westerman
Substitute Teacher

"I would say I think that they should implement some of the policies where there is housing and resources for the homeless in a community-type setting."